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FROM USMISSION UNESCO

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SUBJECT: UNESCO: CUBAN REPRESENTATIVE ATTACKS U.S. IN HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING COMMITTEE

¶11. Summary: Cuba's permanent representative to UNESCO took the opportunity to attack the U.S. today in a UNESCO committee charged with monitoring human rights cases. Ambassador Oliver responded with a short formal statement denouncing the Cuban intervention. End summary.

¶12. UNESCO's Committee on Conventions and Recommendations (CR,) which monitors and responds to human rights violations in member states, met this morning, Thursday, 29 March, to review communications from a variety of human rights groups. Five cases raised today concerned Cuban citizens, all of whom were imprisoned for political activities. Over the past few days, the committee had reviewed cases from Belarus, China, Japan, Iran, Myanmar, Syria, Tunisia, and Vietnam.

¶13. The CR committee, after reaching consensus by its members, generally sends a formal request to the government on behalf of UNESCO requesting the individual be granted clemency, or asks for their immediate release based on humanitarian grounds. While the committee has had moderate success in improving the situation of some prisoners, other cases have been on its agenda for years (e.g., a Chinese case from 1991) with little or no change.

¶14. The Cuban cases concerned the following people; communication number 992/99 Francisco Pastor Chaviano Gonzalez; communication number 1038/2003 Oscar Manuel Espinosa Chepe; communication number 1039/2003 Oscar Elias Biscet Gonzales; communication number 1051/2003 Hector Fernando Maseda Gutierrez; communication number 1052/2003 Jose Luis Garcia Panequie. All of these cases had been reviewed by the CR Committee in previous sessions.

¶15. The head of the Cuban delegation, Hector Hernandez Gonzalez-Pardo, listened to the Director General's representative give a short summary of the issues and problems of each case as noted in the communications received by UNESCO. Gonzalez-Pardo then responded vehemently to the committee's chairman calling the communications, "distortions of fact and of truth," and said that the people who signed them have been manipulated.

¶16. He went on to say that the US is recruiting and paying mercenaries in Cuba, financing activities to undermine the legitimate government, and said that the individuals had all committed crimes against the state supported by the CIA and the US Interests Section in Havana. Gonzalez-Pardo ended his 45-minute tirade by asking the chairman to drop all these cases from the committee's agenda. The silence of the committee members following the Cuban's intervention was also notable, and was later explained as not wanting to dignify the Cuban's remarks by asking questions of him. After a break, the committee resumed, and Ambassador Oliver took her seat to make the following statement.

¶17. Begin quote. Thank you Mr. Chairman. It is regrettable and unfortunate that a committee intended to be a 'good offices' committee to push for reconciliation and dialogue on communications involving human rights violations should have had its time abused this morning for over 45 minutes by vituperative language directed against my country. This is not the level of dignified discourse we expect at this committee. The United States does not believe that the irresponsible statements made this morning against us merit any substantive response. We would like to have this statement reflected in the permanent record. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. End quote.

¶18. After Ambassador Oliver's departure from the room, a representative from Ecuador, Mr. Juan Cueva, who we were told was formerly Ecuador's ambassador to France, delivered brief remarks strongly supporting Cuba. We were told later by Ecuador's regular representative that Cueva is a deputy at Ecuador's Ministry of Education and was present in Paris over the objection of the Foreign Ministry. We were told he was freelancing, though he began his remarks with the mention that he was under specific instructions to intervene. DCM Koss responded forcefully to Cueva, saying that he regretted Cueva's statement, and that the cases before the CR were about Cuba and human rights, and not about the United States.

¶19. Several representatives of other member states,

including Czech, Mexico, and, notably, India were supportive to the U.S. in regards to Cuba's surprising intervention. All of the cases were kept on the committee's agenda, and a draft letter to the government of Cuba is being prepared which will note their representative's presence, without mention of his helpfulness or appreciation of the information he brought, as is normally done. Comments from various representatives to the committee urged that the committee continue to work based on the good faith of its members and not fall into the trap of politicizing its deliberations.

Oliver